

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated. (Maximum of 50 lines for response)

Some high school students will move on to college, some will work in a trade or a business, some will manage households and raise children; but *all* will be involved in relationships with others. The prevalence of family violence and child abuse, teen relationship abuse and date rape, early sexual exploration, and unstable home environments can make the path to healthy relationships a rocky and even a dangerous one. Students may not be able to reach their potential or attain high academic achievement when they are facing these difficult issues on a daily basis. The goal of our “empowerment” project is to provide education and skills on establishing and maintaining healthy relationships to at-risk students, as well as to others who might be turned to for help.

Our project, *STOP! In the Name of Love - Building Healthy Relationships*, combines the adventure-based high school Quest program with an empowerment based social service agency’s educational curriculum. Because research indicates a marked drop in self esteem in adolescent girls, a problem validated by the experience of both the high school and the agency, the decision was made to design this program for female students.\* With the expertise of trained facilitators from the high school and the agency, the project takes a group of ten students through an eight-week course designed to meet the following objectives:

- To increase participants’ level of knowledge about healthy and appropriate relationship behaviors.
- To increase skills that can be utilized in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships.
- To increase self awareness of participants’ strengths and capabilities, thereby improving levels of self confidence and self esteem.
- To increase participants’ communication, problem-solving, decision-making and social skills.
- To increase participants’ ability to work cooperatively and collaboratively with others.
- To encourage students to become advocates and leaders among their peers.

The curriculum includes sessions on gender issues, sexual harassment, relationship violence and abuse, the effects of domestic violence on a victim and a family, healthy relationships, respect for differences, and communication skills. Each after-school session contains a 45-minute educational component with handouts, a 45-minute group ropes course activity, and a 30-minute sharing and closure session. The course also includes an afternoon of cliff rappelling and a hike/overnight camping trip.

Although some educational institutions offer a family life curricula, these programs generally do not touch on the particular issues relevant to today’s teens in their current relationships. Recognizing that today’s teens face tremendous pressure in terms of relationships, as well as situations that require good judgment and decision-making skills, this program was developed to provide a strong foundation for making positive choices in these areas. The student’s sense of self confidence and self worth is heightened, which increases the ability to feel that positive and equal relationships are deserved. High student achievement is more likely when the student’s personal life is not chaotic. The information and skills shared with the students in this program, along with the personal challenges and successes achieved through the physical activities, can enhance their ability to define their priorities and make positive choices when faced with difficult decisions.

This “empowerment” project can be replicated by high schools willing to commit to training requirements for facilitators and to funds needed to represent the program. Technical assistance is available.

*\*Note: Although this particular program was established for female students a comparable program, appropriate for male students is currently being developed.*

2. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the *Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards\** addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standard(s). (Maximum of 50 lines for response)

The young women chosen for this program were identified by either Guidance or our Substance Abuse Counselor as being in abusive dating relationships, potentially abusive relationships, or having low self esteem which might lead to unhealthy relationships later in life. Most of these students were seen as performing below their potential in the classroom.

The Core Curriculum Standard addressed by this practice would be Standard 2.2 for Comprehensive Health and Physical Education, which states, "All students will learn health-enhancing personal, interpersonal and life skills". Because of its heavy emphasis on communication, decision-making in interpersonal relationships, getting to know one's own needs within a relationship and the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, our program teaches our participants to set goals, solve problems and resolve conflicts. In the future, they will have an awareness they did not have before and seek out partners that contribute to their emotional and physical wellness.

Through the use of lectures, interactive lessons, and the ropes course, the young women in this program learned skills to interpret, synthesize and express their needs and feelings in a healthy manner. The participants became more self assured, were able to analyze and communicate their feelings more effectively, and recognized when those needs were not being met or abused. During a typical session, students brainstormed and came up with a list of desired characteristics they would wish in a partner. They then played a card game (the cards having been made up in advance) with some of those qualities on each card, and discussed which traits were, in fact, important. Then they traded the cards until they had their "perfect" mate. Afterwards, they drew their mate and all the relevant characteristics on paper and shared and critiqued each others' work. This activity was followed by a trip to the ropes course where these young women, with fear and trepidation, climbed a tree and walked a wire (while on belay) thirty feet off the ground. The point of the high ropes activity was to recognize fear, meet it head on, and be successful in overcoming the fear and completing the challenge. This concept was then debriefed and tied into their inability to end an unhealthy relationship. It showed them that, even when they are scared, they have the personal strength and self confidence to overcome and remove themselves from adverse conditions. Although it was not always easy to convince them of their safety in advance, when they recognized they had a strong support system in place they realized their goals could be achieved.

The Workplace Readiness Standards addressed by this practice are many.

- Under Standard #1, Career Planning, they learned to get along with others (our group was very diverse and contained young women from cheerleaders to "skaters") and learned personal skills, attitudes and abilities.
- The practice addressed all indicators for Standard #3, Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving, except for (5) Library Media Center and (6) Experiments. This Standard was, perhaps, the main emphasis of the practice –giving young women the skills to recognize and define problems, clarify decisions, be aware of support systems, validate their own thinking, come up with alternative solutions and effectively apply those solutions in a logical, safe way.
- All indicators for Standard #4, Self-Management, were met, except for (9) Time Management and (10) Study Skills. We especially concentrated on constructive criticism, responses to criticism and refusal skills.
- The use of the ropes course also addressed Standard #5, Safety Principles, as far as preventing personal injury and safe physical movement for themselves and others since a great deal of time on the course is spent in accomplishing group initiatives and spotting techniques used to ensure everyone's safety.

This practice was extremely rewarding for all four facilitators as well as the participants and we are looking forward to an even better session this year as we re-evaluate and refine the program.

3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. (Maximum of 60 lines for response)

This program was developed in reaction to student request and an immediate need and assessment tools were not considered in the beginning. Not wishing to stall the motivation of the students and their interest in the issues, formalization of the program occurred during the process when curriculum was finalized and objectives established. Only a post-evaluation form was distributed to participants in this model. In the future, pre-tests and post-tests will be given to more accurately assess the program and its individual components. The evaluations are available for review and the following is a brief summary:

Eight of the ten participants returned evaluations. Respondents were instructed to answer questions which reflected personal growth. Respondents answered an average of thirteen of seventeen possible questions.

- Six out of eight reported a greater understanding of social groups they had previously stereotyped.
- Five out of six reported a more positive attitude about their bodies.
- Four out of five reported that they believed they could choose from a wider range of careers than they had previously believed.
- Four out of six reported feeling stronger about their ability to say *no* to sexual pressure.
- Five out of six reported that the definition of verbal abuse had been clarified for them and felt it should not be tolerated.
- Six out of six reported a better understanding of sexual harassment and what measures can be taken to deal with it.
- Eight out of eight reported a change in their view of how much control their boyfriends should exercise over their lives.
- Six out of seven reported a stronger belief in the importance of working through conflicts in a relationship.
- Six out of seven reported clarification and understanding about what constitutes a healthy dating relationship.
- Six out of six reported being more willing to try activities they had been afraid of trying before the course.

When asked to describe the most valuable part of the program:

- Five out of eight described the bonding, support and friendship of group members.
- Five out of eight reported improved self esteem.
- Four out of eight cited greater knowledge of relationships.
- Three out of eight cited being able to help others.

When asked how they would improve the program:

- Two said nothing was needed.
- Four said the program should be longer.
- One said to include males.
- One said to include more information on family violence and self injury.

Through anecdotal response, we have also concluded that this project was a success. One group participant who was referred to the program through the guidance office, was described by the facilitator as “a runaway, abandoned by her mother as a baby, who self injured, was involved in abusive dating relationships, and had low self esteem”. She attended all sessions, was open to the information and participated fully in the discussions. She independently contacted a local resource for help and is now described by the facilitator as “much improved, more independent, more assured, with increased self esteem”. She self reports increased self esteem, determination not to submit to a controlling and abusive relationship, and a healthy desire to learn more about relationships.

This group of students went on to become leaders in their school in bringing the issue of dating violence to others. They sponsored a “Domestic Violence Awareness Day” and brought a play about dating violence they had previewed to their high school for all students to attend. They also helped facilitate discussion after the performance. Additionally, this group of students is now an in-house resource for the school. They are identified by their peers as knowledgeable about the issues because of their extensive training. The agency and the school can be certain that the information shared with their peers is appropriate and accurate.